

VZCZCXRO7927
PP RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHGI RUEHJS RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW
RUEHROV
DE RUEHRH #1888 3661340
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 311340Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9724
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHIC/ORG OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 9940

UNCLAS RIYADH 001888

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS TO NEA/ARP FOR JHARRIS AND MBLONG

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: HAJJ MESSAGES FOLLOW KING'S LEAD

REF: RIYADH 1780

(U) KEY POINTS

-- Saudi Arabia's Hajj messages stressed themes of tolerance, peace and intrafaith dialogue among the world's Muslim community. Hajj pilgrims departed the Kingdom having been exposed to messages consistent with U.S. interests.

-- The Saudi government has succeeded in getting government-run mosques on message, and sentiments of intolerance have largely disappeared from Friday sermons. This discipline will be sorely tested, however, in the wake of recent conflict in Gaza.

(U) COMMENT

-- Saudi leaders proffered messages of tolerance and Muslim unity during this year's Hajj, exposing pilgrims to messages as carefully scripted as the improved Hajj logistics. The King's call for Muslim unity raises anew the need for intrafaith dialogue among Muslims. King Abdullah last pursued this goal with the June 2008 Mecca Conference. Hajj messages follow a theme seen recently throughout Saudi mosques: consistency in message with less hyperbolic intolerance. Nothing in recent months, however, has captured the Saudi public's attention quitelike this week's events in Gaza. This weekend's worshippers will expect mosque orators to address the Palestinian cause in their sermons.

End Key Points and Comment.

[11](#). (U) Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz spoke to Muslim leaders at an Eid reception. The King called for "a dialogue of the Ummah within itself." Of terrorism, the King said Muslims themselves were responsible. "The terrorism that threatens the entire world is attributed to Muslims alone because of the acts of a few extremists who represent none but themselves." The audience included Sudanese President Omar Bashir and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, among others.

[12](#). (U) Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz al-Sheikh called on pilgrims to stand fast in the face of terrorism. Al-Sheikh advised worshippers that "the Ummah (world Muslim community) is targeted by enemies who are keen on weakening it through creation of conflicts and disputes" and warned against deviant, terrorist and extremist ideologies. He added that

Muslims should believe in other messengers of God: "Whoever does not believe in the messages of the Prophets Jesus and Moses, peace be upon them, is considered an infidel." He further delved into the global financial crisis: "This is the result of ignoring God's rules. Muslims must abide by God's rules, and build their economies accordingly." Al-Sheikh also took time to denounce high-seas piracy and immoral media.

13. (U) The Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs (MoIA) has endeavored to keep Imams in the country's 73,000 mosques on message. MoIA confirmed in October that those spreading deviant ideas face punishment, and Ministry contacts have told us that in fact some Imams have been fired. At the same time, MoIA has sought to upgrade the qualification level of mosque orators. Their approach appears to be paying dividends, as reports of intolerant speech from Saudi mosques have dropped. Meanwhile, key religious figures have fallen in line and promoted the King's messages, including that of interfaith dialogue. (Reftel)

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